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Letter dated 10 August 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to write to you in response to the letter dated 25 July 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland addressed to the President of the Security Council concerning the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic. That letter and its annex were issued on 28 July 2017 as document S/2017/638. In that connection, allow me to convey to you the following facts and information:

- First, my Government is not surprised that the United Kingdom insists on spearheading such suspect political manoeuvers, whether in the context of the work of the United Nations and the Security Council or that of the International Syria Support Group. From the first months of the crisis in my country, the actions of the British Government and the Governments of a number of other States that signed the above-mentioned letter have been aimed at creating conditions conducive to a humanitarian crisis in Syria and then exploiting the resulting suffering to engage in purely political interference in my country's internal affairs that is unprecedented in the annals of international political relations. Non-interference in internal affairs is a core element of the concept of sovereignty and of the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Here, I am referring specifically to the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, the United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

- As for the British Government, its long history of colonial rule across the globe and in the Middle East attests to the fact that it has never sought, at any point in history, to promote stability and security in the world. Moreover, its policies have demonstrated the utmost disdain for the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter and helped to create some of the most dangerous hotspots in the world, including in Palestine, Cyprus, Kashmir, Northern Ireland and South Africa. In addition, it continues to occupy 10 of the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, which remain under foreign rule, to this day. I need only mention the Balfour Declaration, which plundered the entire territory of the State of Palestine, dispersing and displacing millions of its citizens, depriving them of a stable and permanent refuge and homeland. It is therefore not at all surprising that Israel, the occupying Power, would name one of the main streets of occupied Jerusalem after Balfour.

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- Before entering into detail, I wish to draw the attention of the States Members of the United Nations to the fact that many of the Governments of the States whose representatives signed the annex to the letter (S/2017/638) have helped to compound the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people by imposing illegal unilateral coercive economic measures that directly affect various aspects of the lives of Syrian civilians, including access to food, water, health care and basic services related to the availability of electricity, heating, education, freedom of movement, travel and investment in the agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. Furthermore, most of the Governments of the States that signed the above-mentioned letter have joined the illegitimate so-called international coalition led by the United States of America. To date, the air strikes carried out by that coalition in Syrian territory have killed and injured thousands of innocent civilians and destroyed dozens of power plants, water, oil and gas stations and installations, bridges, infrastructure, homes and public and private property. The coalition's actions have caused enormous economic losses, which are estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars, and adversely affected the humanitarian situation in the country.

We are talking about the Governments of States whose unlawful political and military actions have destroyed broad sectors of the Syrian economy and displaced millions of Syrians, placing many of them at risk of drowning or death at sea as they seek to secure the necessities of life and refuge. Therefore, those Governments that support terrorism in Syria or indulge the sponsors of terrorism and that have, to this day, thwarted efforts to arrive at a political solution to the Syrian crisis are not politically, morally or legally qualified to address topics related to the humanitarian situation or humanitarian work in the Syrian Arab Republic.

- In response to the baseless, specious allegations contained in the annex to the letter (S/2017/638), I call on all Member States to refer to the identical letters dated 24 July 2017 that I addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council on behalf of my Government (S/2017/635). Those letters set out the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the forty-first report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/623). I also refer them to the statement that I delivered on behalf of my Government at the Security Council meeting held on 27 July 2017 (S/PV.8015), which was devoted to the monthly briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic that is given by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator. I present to you the main points refuting the allegations made by the Governments of the States that signed the annex to the letter (S/2017/638):

- Most of the Governments of the States that signed the annex to the letter (S/2017/638) continue to exploit and distort the monthly reports of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic in order to pressure, coerce and vilify the Syrian Government. The main reason for this is that, to this day, more than three and a half years after the first report was published, the authors of the monthly reports continue to ignore the real obstacles to humanitarian access in Syria. The most significant of those obstacles are the following:

  (a) The Governments that signed the letter have failed to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly with regard to respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-interference in its internal affairs;

(b) The practices of armed terrorist groups, chief among them the so-called Nusrah Front and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and their affiliated gangs;

(c) The United States of America, the European Union and other States continue to impose unilateral economic sanctions on the Syrian people;

(d) The Governments of donor countries have reneged on their financial pledges. As a result, humanitarian response plans are only 21 per cent funded;

(e) The Governments of the States that signed the letter have failed to fulfil their obligations under Security Council resolution 2165 (2014), particularly with regard to monitoring the borders and mechanisms to control the passage of humanitarian assistance convoys through those borders. Consequently, up to the time of writing, the border crossings have been used to smuggle terrorists and weapons into Syria;

(f) The creation of a hostile military coalition, which includes many of the States that signed the annex to the letter of the representative of the United Kingdom (S/2017/638), that is destroying Syrian infrastructure and killing innocent civilians, and the establishment of military bases in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic without the authorization of its Government;

(g) Certain regional and international actors continue to interfere in Syrian affairs in a harmful manner, with a view to achieving their destructive agendas, prolonging the Syrian crisis and obstructing efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful political resolution through a Syrian-led political process, without foreign intervention.

- The noble humanitarian objectives that humanitarian operations are expected to achieve in Syria are fundamentally unattainable in the absence of a genuine, unpoliticized humanitarian partnership between the Syrian Government and the United Nations. However, the purpose of the monthly reports has been deliberately changed. Instead of focusing on the obstacles to humanitarian access in Syria in order to overcome them, the reports are being used by certain States that are permanent members of the Security Council and other actors to slander the Syrian Government and put pressure on it and its allies in their war against terrorism. They are also being used as a cover for efforts to channel humanitarian aid convoys to armed terrorist groups, instead of the Syrian civilians who rightfully deserve to benefit from them.

- The Syrian Government spares no effort to fulfil its responsibilities with respect to improving the living conditions of Syrian civilians in all areas, without discrimination. However, United Nations humanitarian affairs officials, particularly those with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), have chosen to take an adversarial position, thus undermining cooperation and trust, and to question the credibility of the Syrian Government as a humanitarian partner, the cooperation of which is essential for the implementation of the humanitarian response plans.

- As documented in official records, many officials of international and United Nations agencies working on the ground in Syria have distanced themselves from the monthly reports of the Secretary-General with respect to the work of their agencies. Indeed, they have confirmed that they had not given information to OCHA and that they reject the harmful and fragmented manner in which such information is presented in the monthly reports, because it does not reflect the reality of their coordination and cooperation with the Syrian

Government in relation to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Instead, those international and United Nations officials have said that some OCHA officials are attempting to turn them against the Syrian Government. They say that OCHA officials have told them that the Office does not need to coordinate with the Syrian Government in order to carry out its activities. Needless to say, such statements run counter to the obligations of OCHA towards the Syrian Government under Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). There is also no need to remind OCHA officials that those resolutions define the parameters of their role in Syria, a role that is limited to coordinating the distribution of humanitarian assistance. They must not usurp the mandate of United Nations and international organizations and agencies to distribute such assistance.

- The Syrian Government is keen to clarify the facts in relation to the implementation of the plan for the dispatch of humanitarian assistance convoys to unstable regions. My Government has sent many letters to the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the United Nations Office at Geneva in which it provides information and precise figures on the humanitarian convoys operated by national humanitarian partners. However, the authors of the report and the representatives of OCHA continue to tamper with those figures. Their actions are in line with an agenda that is aimed at putting pressure on my Government and intimidate it. For example, the authors of the forty-first report state that only two humanitarian convoys were dispatched to hard-to-reach areas since April 2017. However, according to facts and documented reports from humanitarian organizations and partners on the ground, 48 convoys have reached those areas since the beginning of 2017.

My Government will not allow itself to be caught up in the barefaced political game being played by some of the Governments whose representatives signed the annex to the letter (S/2017/638). It will continue to fulfil its constitutional duties to the citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic, whether by working and cooperating with all humanitarian partners to deliver humanitarian assistance to those who truly need it throughout Syria, or by combating the terrorism of ISIL, Al-Qaida and the Nusrah Front and associated individuals, groups and entities, or by striving with serious and credible international partners to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis through a Syrian-led process, without harmful interference or dangerous foreign directives that conflict with the genuine national interests of the Syrian Arab Republic and all its citizens.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is confident that the majority of Security Council members will not be swayed by the attempts of some of its permanent members to politicize humanitarian work in Syria. At the same time, it urges the Security Council to discharge its responsibility to maintain international peace and security and take the measures needed to ensure that:

1. All Member States commit to implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism, particularly the provisions relating to definitively ending the provision of funding, weapons and support for armed terrorist groups in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. All Member States commit to refraining from any practices or harmful interference aimed at distorting the noble aims of humanitarian work and exploiting it to hinder the intra-Syrian political process that is being facilitated by the United Nations and aimed at resolving the Syrian crisis in a manner that is decided by Syrian themselves, without outside interference.

3. A firm stance is taken against the coercive economic measures that are being unilaterally imposed on the Syrian people by the Governments of some Member States.

4. A clear legal position is taken vis-à-vis the acts of aggression committed by the illegitimate so-called international coalition led by the United States of America against the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic under the pretext of combating ISIL. The bombings, vandalism and destruction that are being committed by the coalition must come to an end, and the Governments of the participating States must be held politically, morally, legally and materially responsible for the acts of systematic destruction and murder perpetrated by their military forces operating within the framework of this illegitimate coalition over the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative